

## Message Text

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43

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 USIE-00 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 RSC-01

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

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S E C R E T SAIGON 1344

DEPT PASS IMMEDIATE TO IBS/NCA

EO 11652: XGDS2 - IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: RECENT OPPOSITION ACTIVITY

REF: A. EAST ASIA BRIEF 017-75

B. DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA DATED JAN 29, 1975

1. THE TWO REF PUBLICATIONS RECENTLY CARRIED ARTICLES ON OPPOSITION ACTIVITY IN SVN WHICH CONTAIN IMPORTANT ERRORS. IN VIEW OF CURRENT INTEREST IN THIS SUBJECT, WE WISH TO CALL THESE TO DEPT'S ATTENTION.

2. PEOPLE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT (PACM) AND THE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION FORCE (NRF) ARE TWO RECENTLY FOUNDED GROUPS AMONG THE RADICAL OPPOSITION. THEY HAVE BEEN OVER RECENT MONTHS TWO OF THE MORE VOCAL MEMBERS OF THE RADICAL OPPOSITION. PACM IS ASSOCIATED TO A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE, THOUGH NOT EXCLUSIVELY, WITH CATHOLIC POLITICAL PERSONALITIES, AND THE NRF IS A BUDDHIST ORGANIZATION. THESE TWO GROUPS, HOWEVER, MOST CERTAINLY CANNOT BE IDENTIFIED AS SVN'S PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION GROUPS; NOR CAN SEN VU VAN MAU AND FR. TRAN HUU THANH BE IDENTIFIED AS THE "RESPECTIVE HEADS OF THE BUDDHIST AND CATHOLIC OPPOSITION". AS INDICATED IN PREVIOUS EMB REPORTING, FR. THANH HAS ONLY VERY LIMITED BACKING AMONG THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY AND, WHILE THEY ACCORD HIM SYMPATHY IN HIS ANTI-CORRUPTION AIMS, FEW ESTABLISHED CATHOLIC POLITICAL LEADERS HAVE GIVEN HIM ANY SIGNI-

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FICANT SUPPORT.

3. SIMILARLY, SEN MAU REPRESENTS ONE FACTION OF THE BUDDHIST OPPOSITION WHICH HAS THE BACKING OF ONLY ONE FACTION OF THE AN QUANG CHURCH. THERE ARE OTHER IMPORTANT OPPOSITION SENATORS, ALSO ASSOCIATED WITH AN QUANG, WHO DO NOT ACCEPT MAU'S LEADERSHIP AND A NUMBER OF LEADING VENERABLES IN THE HIGH SECULAR COUNCIL (HSC) OF THE AN QUANG CHURCH WHO DO NOT SUPPORT MAU.

4. WITH RESPECT TO THE RECENT ELECTION FOR A NEW MEMBERSHIP FOR THE VIEN HOA DAO (HIGH SECULAR COUNCIL), WE BELIEVE THAT THE STATEMENT THAT "CONSEQUENTLY THE CHURCH MAY NOW BEGIN TO ADOPT A TOUGHER ANTI-GOVT POSITION AND PROVIDE MORE DIRECT SUPPORT TO THE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION FORCE" IS NOT SUPPORTED BY THE FACTS AS WE CURRENTLY SEE THEM. AS REPORTED BY THE EMB, THE ELECTION WAS SEEN AS A VICTORY FOR THE MORE MILITANT TRI QUANG FACTION IN THAT THE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS ON THE HSC ARE PARCELLED OUT SOMEWHAT MORE FAVORABLY TO THAT FACTION. AS THE EMB ALSO RECORDED, HOWEVER, THE LESS MILITANT THIEN MINH FACTION PROBABLY CAN STILL MUSTER A MAJORITY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE HSC ONHYRWL EDGZRG GIHGDAU IJOKLTANTLY, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE AN QUANG CHURCH WILL UNDERTAKE ANY RADICALLY NEW POLITICAL MOVES AS LONG AS A SUBSTANTIAL PART OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE HSC OBJECTS.

5. FURTHER, THE EMB HAS REPORTED AT SOME LENGTH ON THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH WE SEE AS IMPEDING BUDDHIST-CATHOLIC COOPERATION AND THE REASONS WHY WE BELIEVE SUCH COOPERATION UNLIKELY TO OCCUR. IT IS CERTAINLY TRUE THAT FR. THANH WOULD WELCOME THE SUPPORT OF THE BUDDHISTS, BUT FR. THANH DOES NOT, AS INDICATED ABOVE, REPRESENT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY TO RECEIVE SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT FROM AN QUANG BUDDHISTS. THE AN QUANG DID NOT, FOR EXAMPLE, SIGN THE FEB 1 "POLITICAL INDICTMENT" SPONSORED BY FR. THANH AND SIGNED BY HIM AND A NUMBER OF OTHERS.

6. THERE ARE SOME OTHER FAIRLY IMPORTANT ERRORS IN THE SUBJECT ARTICLE. FOR INSTANCE, IT IS STATED THAT PACM AND NRF WERE JOINED BY "TWO OF THE COUNTRY'S OTHER IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS SECTS -- THE HOA HAO AND CAO DAI" IN PETITIONING THE SUPREME COURT  
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TO NULLIFY TWO GOVT DECREES AUTHORIZING THE PRESIDENT'S WIFE TO PURCHASE PUBLIC LAND IN LONG KHANH PROVINCE. IN REALITY, A SUIT TO THIS EFFECT WAS BROUGHT BY A NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS, INCLUDING ONE HOA HAO AND ONE CAO DAI PERSONALITY. THESE TWO RELIGIOUS GROUPS ARE SUFFICIENTLY FRAGMENTED THAT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY ANY ONE INDIVIDUAL SPEAKS FOR EITHER RELIGION. IN THIS CASE, HOWEVER, THE INDIVIDUALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SUIT CANNOT EVEN BE SAID TO SPEAK FOR A SIGNIFICANT FACTION WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE

RELIGIONS.

7. THE ARTICLE GOES ON TO SAY THE SAME FOUR GROUPS "JOINTLY SPONSORED A RESOLUTION IN THE SENATE CALLING FOR THIEU'S RESIGNATION. SPONSORED BY SEN VU VAN MAU AND FR. TRAN HUU THANH, THE RESPECTIVE HEADS OF THE BUDDHIST AND CATHOLIC OPPOSITIONS, THE RESOLUTION CARRIES NO LEGAL IMPACT." THERE HAS BEEN NO SUCH RESOLUTION INTRODUCED INTO THE SENATE, AND THE PARTIES REFERRED TO, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SEN MAU, HAVE NO STANDING TO INTRODUCE SUCH A RESOLUTION INTO THE SENATE.

8. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE ARTICLE REFERS TO A MTG OF RADICAL OPPOSITION GROUPS ON JAN 26 AT THE AN QUANG PAGODA ON THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE CEASEFIRE AT WHICH TIME EIGHTEEN OPPOSITION GROUPS JOINTLY SIGNED A RESOLUTION OF NO CONFIDENCE WHICH CALLED FOR THE RESIGNATION OF PRES THIEU. IN THE CASE OF EACH OF THESE GROUPS, THE SAME DEMAND HAD BEEN MADE IN PREVIOUS STATEMENTS.

9. THE ARTICLE IS PROBABLY CORRECT WHEN IT REMARKS THAT "THESE LATEST MOVES ARE DESIGNED IN PART TO RECAPTURE WHAT MOMENTUM THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION HAD MANAGED TO GENERATE PRIOR TO THE STEP-UP OF COMMUNIST MILITARY ATTACKS IN EARLY DEC. THE ISSUES OF CORRUPTION IN GOVT AND PRESS CENSORSHIP WERE QUICKLY DISSIPATED BY INITIAL BATTLEFIELD REPORTS OF LARGE TERRITORIAL GAINS BY THE COMMUNISTS." CONTINUING CONCERN ABOUT THE MILITARY SITUATION MAKE UNLIKELY THAT THE OPPOSITION WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN THIS EFFORT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

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